



# Community Health Center Association of Connecticut

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Testimony of

Community Health Center Association of Connecticut

Program Review and Investigations Committee

Hospital Emergency Department Use and its Impact on the State Budget

September 26, 2013

The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) is a nonprofit organization that exists to advance the common interests of Connecticut's federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in providing quality health care. Through training, technical assistance, public policy work and other initiatives, CHCACT supports the 14 FQHCs in their provision of comprehensive health care to over 342,000 residents across the state every year.

A profile of FQHC patients in Connecticut (2012):

- 95% low income (under 200% of federal poverty level)
- 60% Medicaid
- 23% uninsured
- 14,800 homeless
- 73% racial/ethnic minorities
- 29% best served in a language other than English

Connecticut's FQHCs are spread across the state, from Torrington to Norwich, from Stamford to Putnam. In both urban and rural areas, they provide medical, dental and behavioral health services, as well as enabling services (like case management and help with transportation) to people of all ages *regardless of their ability to pay*.

Although the FQHC movement is over forty years old, there is renewed attention to FQHCs as health reform is implemented. Based on the experience of Massachusetts, policy experts project an enormous growth in the FQHC population over the next few years as more Americans have access to health insurance – and therefore seek access to health care services.

FQHCs are a true alternative to the majority of emergency room visits that are of a nonemergency nature:

- Almost every hospital in the state has an FQHC site within a couple of miles;
- Like hospitals, FQHCs do not turn away patients if they do not have health insurance;
- FQHCs are located in “medically underserved areas,” where there is limited access to private health care providers;

(continued...)

- FQHCs are prepared to provide primary care and “sick care,” as well as to refer to specialists; and,
- FQHCs are open nontraditional hours (see attachment for hours of CHCACT-affiliated FQHCs).

Moreover, and important to this committee’s study, the average rate paid to an FQHC for a medical visit is \$145.05. However, the average cost to Medicaid for an ED visit in 2012 was \$342<sup>1</sup>.

The added benefit of a patient visiting an FQHC is that the person will then be connected into a “medical home,” thereby hopefully avoiding future unnecessary emergency department visits.

On behalf of our affiliated centers, CHCACT would be pleased to continue to work with this committee throughout the duration of the study and beyond, to work on solutions for reducing unnecessary emergency department visits.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> PRI Staff Update Highlights, September 26, 2013